Greater Prince William TRAILS COALITION

VDOT Proposes to Cut Neabsco Greenway in Half

The Trails and Blueways Council was surprised to be told on January 28 that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) was planning to build a massive culvert underneath the **southbound I-95 bridge** over Neabsco Creek.

The culvert would prevent construction of the Neabsco Greenway trail at I-95, even though the trail was included in the **Mobility Chapter** of the county's Comprehensive Plan when officially adopted by the Board of County Supervisors in 2022.

If VDOT's culvert is built, the Neabsco Greenway would be blocked at I-95. Residents of Dale City would never be able to use the greenway to get to the Neabsco Boardwalk, a shining jewel in the county's park system.

Apparently the Prince William Transportation Department first asked about how the VDOT project would accommodate the trail on January 15. The response was that VDOT has reached the 35% design stage now, and "*this request could no longer be accommodated since we are already too far advance in the project development process. The replacement option we have is a single span arch culvert because of the many benefits it provides compared to a 3-span bridge.*"

VDOT had notified the county last August that it was willing to hold a public hearing on the project, but it appears there was no response from county staff asking for that opportunity for public engagement.

Either several months of VDOT planning, or years of planning for a complete Neabsco Greenway, need to be revised.

GOAL STATEMENT

Preserve the County's natural beauty and resources so that open spaces are created and maintained, and residents can enjoy nature.

Key Objectives

2

Enhance and expand public parks, trails, and green spaces to improve accessibility.

Strategies:

1. Prioritize land acquisition across the County to expand park access for all residents.
2. Ensure that all county parks meet a defined level of quality, appearance, and accessibility and prioritize maintenance and expansion where parks are not easily accessible.
3. Improve walkability and bikeability around public amenities and parks.

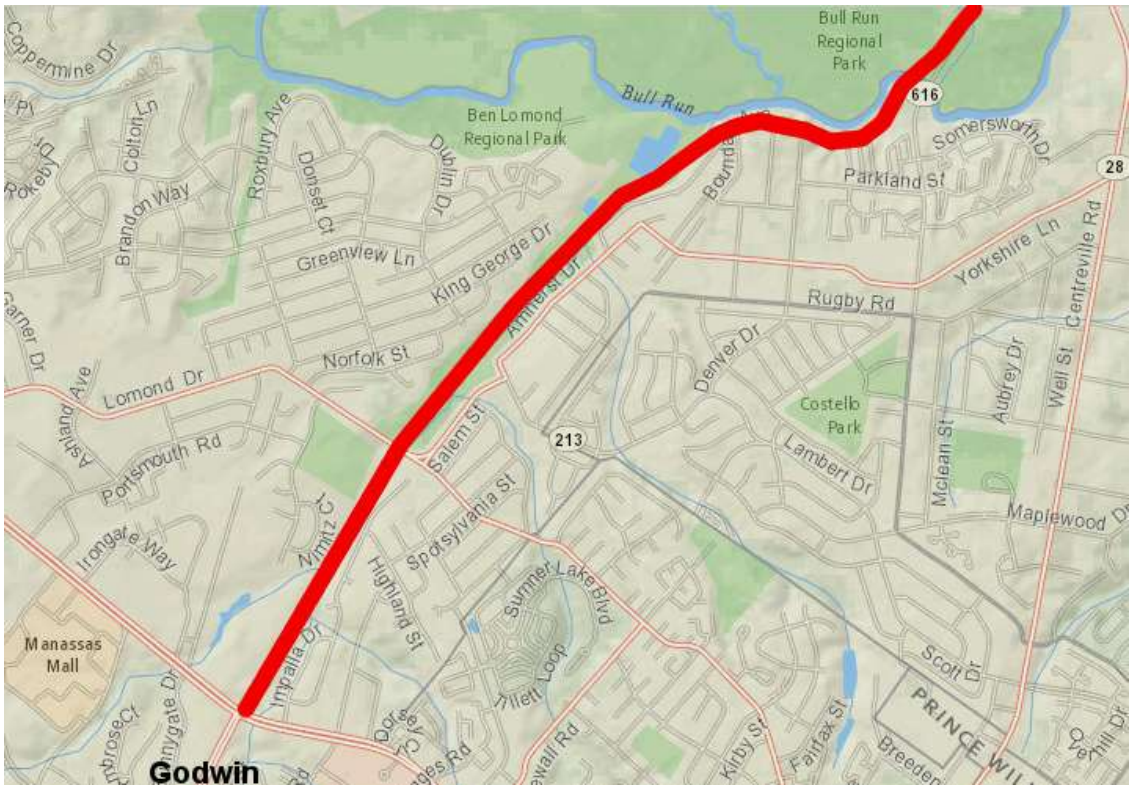
No New Funding for Trail Construction in the FY2026-2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) - Yet…

The Prince William Board of County Supervisors is expected to approve the **2025-2028 Strategic Plan** on February 11. The Mobility Goal is "*Foster an inter-connected and accessible transportation network that advances the County's mobility infrastructure, broadens transportation choices, and enhances safety*."

Over 50% of the $1.24 billion in the **FY2026-2031 Capital Improvement Program** (CIP) is for "transportation," which includes roads, transit and bike/pedestrian infrastructure. When the Prince William Transportation Department builds new roads now, it anticipates adding shared use paths on both sides will absorb 10-20% of the project's cost.

At the moment, before supervisors make changes to the staff's first draft, there is *no new FY26 funding for constructing bike/pedestrian facilities*. The only dedicated trails funding is for projects already funded by the bond referendum in 2019. The CIP does continue the $1.2 million added in FY25 for Parks & Recreation, in response to requests from trails advocates.

The FY26 budget gets presented to the supervisors on February 11. If you have a perspective on FY26 funding to start constructing the bike/pedestrian infrastructure in the **Countywide Trails Plan**, you can contact county supervisors at **bocs@pwcva.gov**



Route 28 Bypass Cancelled

The Prince William Board of County Supervisors (BOCS) cancelled the **Route 28 Bypass** on February 4.

That project was supposed to provide a Shared Use Path along Flat Branch from Sudley Road to Bull Run. The Trails and Blueways Council **passed a resolution** at its earlier January meeting asking the BOCS to fund a trail along Flat Branch, if the bypass was cancelled, but the Flat Branch Trail was not discussed when the bypass decision was made.
Current design of the City of Manassas' **Sudley Road Third Lane Project** has now-unnecessary left and right turn lanes from Sudley Road leading to the now-cancelled extension of Godwin Drive.

Prince William County has considered developing a Yorkshire **Small Area Plan**, but that project is not "live" at the moment.

GPWTC Quarterly Meeting Report

- The City of Manassas **Mobility Master Plan** will be completed this Summer, with adoption by City Council expected by the end of 2025. **Comments on draft** are being accepted now, but feedback specifically on mobility will be requested later as well.
- The city's most recent **Connections Newsletter** quotes Chloe Delhomme regarding the number of centerline lane miles of bike/pedestrian infrastructure in Manassas: "We currently have 14.4 miles of share-use paths, 6.4 miles of bike lanes, and 13.8 miles of signed shared roads, but those numbers are increasing all the time." All trails identified on the city's bike map are asphalt paths, even in the parks. **Costs for different trails** are in the city budget. [*The **Godwin Drive North Trail Extension** from Wellington-Sudley Road, connecting to Flat Branch Trail, is projected to cost about $13 million/mile. There are 254 lane miles of roads in the city.*]
- *[Steve Hall reports that there are seven (7) miles of asphalt trail in Manassas Park, with the majority being in Blooms Park. There are no bike lanes in that city.]*
- Prince Willliam County will launch a Countywide Trails Master Plan in 2025. It is intended to refine the **trails plan** now in the current 2040 Mobility Chapter so projects could be funded through the county budget. Trail advocates will have the opportunity to propose trail alignments that could be revised/added.
- East Coast Greenway has a **design guide** calling for 10-12 foot wide trail useable by road bikes. Trai planners publish a route that is open for use and mostly consistent with design guide, but also envision possible changes in the route as segments of other trails are completed. **Current map** could be revised. In Virginia, 20% of the greenway is completed.
- Greater Prince William Trails Coalition has received IRS Letter of Determination declaring it is officially a 501(c)(3) organization. The Board of Directors has approved a balanced budget for 2025.
- By mid-April, Prince William Department of Parks and Recreation will have the final report from a contractor evaluating how to close gaps in Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (see below).

February Stakeholder Meetings: How Should We Close Gaps in Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail (PHNST)?

Prince William Department of Parks and Recreation will hold two stakeholder meetings to review the consultant's recommendations for the alignment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail. The consultant, hired with funding from a **Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant**, will present their recommendations and hear feedback before the preparation of the final report.

Meeting on Gap 1 (Occoquan to Belmont Bay) will be on February 12. Recommendations on closing Gaps 2 and 3 (Town of Dumfries and Joplin Road) will be discussed on February 20.

Both meetings are hybrid between 1:00-2:30pm. You can come in person to the Hellwig Building Board Room (14420 Bristow Road Manassas, VA) or join online via WebEx:

Gap 1 (February 12, Town of Occoquan to Belmont Bay)

https://pwc-doit.webex.com/pwc-doit/j.php?MTID=mc9ed8055b39b49eeee36daa94c7f3b33

Meeting number (access code): 2305 499 6148

Meeting password: aJ3GV5JMBg3

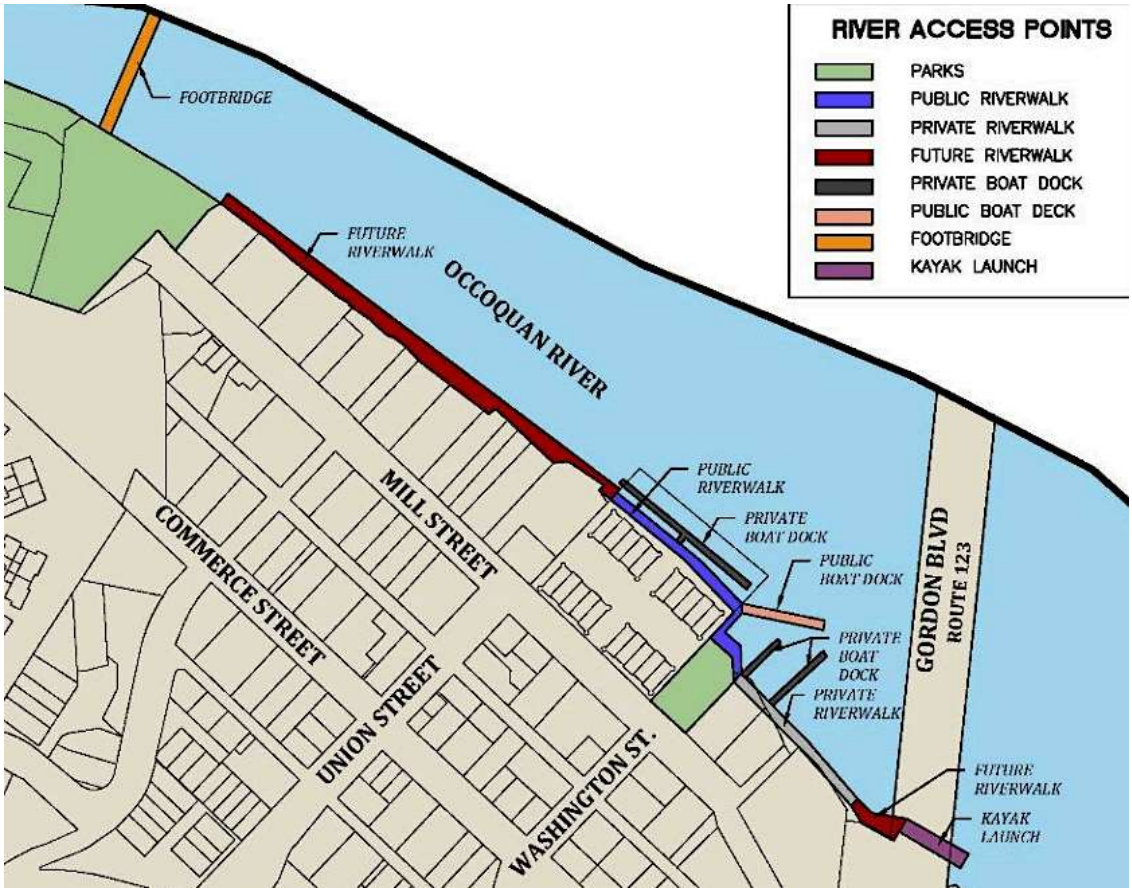
Gaps 2 &3 (February 20, Town of Dumfries and Joplin Road)

https://pwc-doit.webex.com/pwc-doit/j.php?MTID=m51652b89fe7bb55c3b0a3ad662a7b094

Meeting number (access code): 2303 697 1962

Meeting password: Q5MkZUV8Pc3

The PHNST Subcommittee of the Prince William Trails and Blueways Council (TBC) will meet February 26, starting at 3:00pm in the Hellwig Building Board Room. The entire TBC typically meets the **fourth Tuesday of each month**.



Occoquan Is A “Trail Town”

As described in the Town of Occoquan’s **Vision 2026 Comprehensive Plan**, “*the Riverwalk is planned to span the length of the town along the river, creating a path from the Canoe and Kayak Launch under the Route 123 bridge to River Mill Park at the western end of town.*”

Completion of The Mill at Occoquan development, replacing an old boat storage facility., will expand the Riverwalk by 30%. Remaining challenge is to complete it at the “rear” of lots between Route 123 and Mamie Davis Park. A canoe, kayak and stand-up paddleboard launch opened to the public underneath the Route 123 bridge in April 2021.

Can the PHNST Get Built Next to “The Townes at Occoquan”?

The original rezoning proposal for “Destination Place” has been renamed “The Townes at Occoquan.” There is now a proffer in **REZ2024-00033** that would allow the county to construct a trail along the waterfront of the Occoquan River. That opportunity was not in the original proposal. However, the latest proffer includes “poison pill” provisions that Prince William County is very unlikely to ever meet.

The revised proposal also includes no public access from Annapolis Drive to the waterfront. Building walkable communities and creating a multi-mobility transportation network in Prince William County will require a variety of connections between trail segments.

What Happened At the Last Trails and Blueways Council (TBC) Meeting?

- TBC approved resolution asking Board of County Supervisors to fund the Flat Branch Trail if the **Route 28 Bypass is cancelled** on February 4.

- New Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) GIS specialist should start work in about a month
- Prince William Transportation Department is applying for **Transportation-Land Use Connections (TLC) grants** and Regional Roadway Safety Program grants, includes a trail on Dumfries Road between City of Manassas and Brentsville interchange.
- On February 26, 6:00-8:00pm, VDOT will hold a **public hearing** on planned innovative intersection improvements along Route 28 (Centreville Road) between Manassas Drive and Spruce Street.
- PW Transportation Department and DPR are developing proposal to spend $1 million for trails construction in last year's FY25 budget, Cost estimate to build 0.1 mile of sidewalk on Dawson Beach Road was $1.7 million.
- TBC has drafted 2025 goals and trails priorities, including projected costs, for discussion with BOCS members during FY26 budget season. The proposed 2025 TBC work plan is in the **January agenda**.
- DPR consultant has drafted consistent signage proposal for parks. Next steps: inventory existing signs and draft consistent design approach for county trails (including wayfinding signs), building on work already done by **Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts** (MORE). Two members of TBC, Jason Williams and Rich Wilson, will be honored as Trail Builders of the Year at MORE's February 22 Winter Membership Meeting.

State of the Parks Address on February 13

Seth Hendler-Voss, Director of Prince William County Parks & Recreation will deliver the **State of the Parks address** and share findings from the 2024 Annual Report.

Doors open at 6:30pm, program (with a questions and answer period) lasts from 7:00-9:00pm. Event is at Forest Park High School Auditorium, 15721 Forest Park Drive in Woodbridge.

Getting Public Access to Public Lakes - and Quantico Creek

Prince William County has planned a network of blueways for boating/fishing on lakes and streams. The water is there, but key access points are missing.
Nearly 15-20,000 people will be moving into the Vint Hill Road corridor, if developers build all the houses stimulated by the adoption of a revised Land Use Plan in 2022. The new residents will increase the demand for public access to parks, trails, and blueways. One opportunity is to re-open Lake Manassas for non-motorized boats and fishing, for which the Prince William Conservation Alliance **has advocated** for over 15 years.

Lake Jackson is a public lake without public access at the moment, but two canoe/kayak launch ramps are proposed in the **Doves Landing Park Master Plan**. Prince William County **spent nearly $1 million** to repair the dam after the 2011 earthquake and plans to spend more to deal with the sluice gates, to preserve the lake.

Just below the Lake Jackson Dam there is a difficult-to-reach public access point for launching on the Occoquan River (red X, above), There is no other access ramp on the Prince William County side of the Occoquan Reservoir for over 14 miles downstream until reaching Lake Ridge Park.

The Town of Dumfries is planning to become a port again. In December **it purchased 191 acres on Quantico Creek** and established the Waterfront District, with plans for a boardwalk. Mayor Derrick Wood said: “When you think of Occoquan, you think of the waterfront. In Dumfries, if you look at our logo, you see water, which is important to us.”

Trails Are Health Tools (Spread the Word…)

Getting outdoors for a walk in a green space is the most cost-effective way to improve mental and physical health - but what if there's no place to go, and no trail to get there?

You can enhance the focus on the connection between trails and health by completing the **Community Health Assessment survey** by the end of February.

The Greater Prince William Trails Coalition is a community partner with the **Community Healthcare Coalition of Greater Prince William** - you'll see our logo on outreach for the survey.

Second Sunday Hike: February 9, 1:00-3:00pm

The heavy snow and ice in January forced us to postpone the hike at Dove's Landing Park. We'll try again in February. **Please register** in case there's bad weather, a plague of frogs, or

something else that forces a change in plans.

At the General Assembly

"Crossover" at the General Assembly was February 4. Bills passed by one house are alive; almost others are now dead for this session. The most recent **Virginia Bicycling Federation update** was issued just before crossover.

The **Washington Area Bicyclist Association** (WABA) reported before February 4:
We're nearing the halfway point of the Virginia General Assembly session – bills must pass their originating chamber before 'crossover day' on Tuesday, February 4th. A handful of bills we've been watching and supporting have made the cut including:

- ***SB1233**, a bill to allow camera enforcement at stop signs and crosswalks;*
- ***SB1007**, a substitute bill from Sen. Scott Surovell that directs the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority to convene a stakeholder group and recommend options for funding bicycle and pedestrian projects in Northern Virginia; and*
- ***HB2096**, a bill championed by Families for Safe Streets that would require repeat reckless drivers to install an intelligent speed assistance (ISA) device in their vehicle to prevent them from speeding.*

*A **700-foot stretch of sidewalk** along Old Bridge Road between Oakwood to Forest Hill roads now has a sidewalk. The $1.36 million project was funded through a Transportation Alternatives Program grant.*

In Other News…

- Early Alert: Prince William Transportation Department plans to hold public meetings on February 20 and 27 to discuss the Comprehensive Safety Action Plan, funded in part by a **Safe Streets and Roads for All** grant. First meeting on February 20 will be at the Ferlazzo

Building. **Trail Keepers Coalition** is now identifying safety issues at intersections near schools across the county. Survey should be completed by April, and results will provide input to the safety plan.

- VDOT is holding a **public hearing** on the **Route 28 Innovative Intersections** ("Fix Route 28") plan. Meeting is 6:00-8:00pm at Manassas Park City Hall.
- The **Community Healthcare Coalition of Greater Prince William** is gathering public input via a survey to complete the Community Health Assessment. If you think trails are an essential resource to enhance physical and mental health, **fill out the survey** before February 24.
- The latest Pedestrian and Bicycle Center (PBIC) **Messenger** newsletter includes links to a **Bicyclist Stop-as-Yield Law Analysis** and the new **American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Bike Guide**.
- **Family Biking Matters: Make streets safer with art** (Greater Greater Washington, January 21) Street murals slow traffic and enhance curb extensions - as well as brighten up drab pavement.
- Registration is now open for the **May 10 Trailblazer bike ride** on the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail.
- The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club has numerous **opportunities for volunteers**, both outdoors and in the office.
- Prince William Trails and Streams has **scheduled clean-ups** for Neabsco Creek and Boardwalk Cleanup on March 1 and Marumsco Creek / Veteran's Park Cleanup on March 22, from 9:00am-noon on both days.

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